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In Her Own Words:

Linda Castillo talks about the inspiration of her background for *SWORN TO SILENCE*

I grew up in Ohio's farm country and went to school with several Amish children. At the time, I didn't realize how fascinating and rich in history the culture was. A visit to Amish country in 2004 prompted the core idea and setting for *SWORN TO SILENCE*. But that was only the beginning.

I was working on *SWORN TO SILENCE* when the horrific Amish school shootings occurred in Pennsylvania. The event hit me particularly hard because I had done a tremendous amount of research on the Amish. In the aftermath of the shootings, like many Americans, I was angry and wanted answers. In stark contrast to my own reaction, the Amish mindset was one of forgiveness. That tragedy illuminated some very fundamental differences between the Amish and mainstream society. It was an enlightening moment for me as a writer.

For two centuries, the Amish culture has changed little. They are not touched by outside influences. Most Americans couldn't imagine living without their cell phones and cars and all of the conveniences modern life offers. Yet the Amish continue to flourish without any of those things. No electricity. No telephones. No gasoline powered vehicles. We complain about the price of gasoline, yet the Amish have little use for it. The contrast of old versus new is profound.

Amish church districts are a tightly-knit society. Neighbors truly know their neighbors. They're connected in ways that mainstream American society is not. When someone needs help, the community is there to do whatever needs to be done. Barn raisings are not an invention of Hollywood; they are part of Amish life. I have a friend in Ohio whose house burned down a couple of years ago. She is not Amish, yet her Amish neighbors came to her aid and built a new house for her.

I couldn't think of a more interesting setting for my book. As a writer, I wanted to explore this fascinating culture. I wanted to write a protagonist that could immerse us in that world. A character torn between two cultures—cultures that many times clash. I wanted to inject something terrible into this wholesome small town to see how this diverse character handled that kind of stress. I love the juxtaposition of wholesome versus evil.